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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000230

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MULTIPLE FORMAT CHANGES)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: ON THE MFA'S RADAR SCREEN: INTERNAL GOSL DISSENT
AND REGIONAL FOOD PROBLEMS

REF: FREETOWN 225

FREETOWN 00000230 001.3 OF 002

Classified by Ambassador June Carter Perry (1.4 b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Sierra Leone's Brazil-bound Minister of Foreign Affairs Bangura met with Ambassador May 2 to pronounce on the upcoming Mano River Basin Union (MRU) agenda in Monrovia. Although Cote d'Ivoire's official acceptance was on the formal agenda, the region's food crisis was The "real" topic for discussion in her view. She said the Government (GOSL) would likely request emergency food assistance from the USG. Regarding an airplane (owned by a Florida company and crew held for five days at Freetown's Lungi airport. Bangura stated President Koroma had signed off on the plane's release. (Note: She said approval for landing had not been given; the Minister of Transportation told us earlier it had been approved. End Note.) The Foreign Minister offered her interpretation of the meeting with Assistant Secretary (A/S) Jendayi Frazer in Washington. She remarked that the A/S had suggested she speak with the U.S. Ambassador in Freetown again concerning the Millennium Challenge Corporation criteria. The Minister also plans to travel to New York for the Peacebuilding Commission high level meeting on May 19 and then on to Japan.

12. (C) The disparate positions of the Ministers of Transport and Foreign Affairs regarding the approval/non-approval of the U.S. company's aircraft to land reflects what we see as a continuing lack of communication between the new government officials. Regarding the MRU, we will see if the food situation results in a concrete request from the GOSL in the coming week or so. End Summary.

TRAVELING FEVER

13. (C) Foreign Minister Bangura and Ambassador met one-on-one between the FoMin's trips to the U.S., Brazil and Liberia (then to New York and Japan). According to her, President Koroma remained upset with Energy Minister Kabbah and therefore had requested the Foreign Minister to go to Brazil with Trade Minister Koroma for a conference on energy. Reportedly, the Minister of Energy violated contracting procedures in order to keep the President's word that lights would be on by Christmas 2007. The Foreign Minister stated her boss had "kicked the Energy Minister out of his office" and was disgruntled by her lack of transparency.

14. (C) Regarding the U.S. Miami, Florida owned plane held at Sierra Leone's Lungi airport for five days, the FoMin expressed the GOSL's deepest "concern" about drug smugglers and therefore were searching the plane. She claimed the

President had given permission for the aircraft to depart (following repeated requests from post after calls from the U.S. firm). She asserted the landing had not been approved, thus contradicting the transport news statement earlier to me that approval had been granted. (Note: The plane was released mid-afternoon on May 2. End Note.)

Mano River Basin's Deep Crisis

15. (C) Mrs. Bangura related, when asked, the MRU's main goals in Monrovia. She responded that the stated major agenda item was Cote d'Ivoire's status in the regional organization. However, the "real" reason for the session was the high price of food which has caused instability in several countries. Sierra Leone faces a food crisis with a 50 Kilo bag selling now at 130,000 leones (about \$45.00 dollars). In December, the cost was 90,000 leones (about \$30.00 dollars). She hoped the MRU would work out a way to share the burden but thus far, neighboring countries have banned exports. Although she indicated GOSL would do an official emergency request, that has not yet happened. (Note: Post has sent in a request for the President's new food initiative to assist Sierra Leone, the world's poorest country, using USG mechanisms now on the ground and additional TDY personnel. End Note.) We responded we would try to increase our support without making a firm amount or dollar commitment.

Washington Visit

16. (C) Bangura was eager to share how delighted she was to have met with the AF Assistant Secretary in Washington on April 18. She felt the meeting had been very useful and noted the A/S had referred her to me to discuss the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). (Note: We have had numerous conversations with the FoMin, Finance Minister and others concerning what it takes to meet the criteria for MCA. Often, GOSL officials will observe that other countries have compacts in place. Our response has been to walk the senior ministers through the steps necessary to even reach

FREETOWN 00000230 002.3 OF 002

eligibility and threshold status, adding in a post-conflict country, achieving the basic criteria would take longer. End Note.) Concerning the ousted GOSL envoy from their Washington Embassy, the FoMin said she had seen him recently. She said she was not aware, until we discussed that issue again, that his family was seeking asylum in the U.S. and appeared puzzled that they would do so. We agreed to talk again once her travels are completed, likely by the end of May. The FoMin is to leave May 16/17 for New York to attend the Peacebuilding Commission High Level meeting and then travel to Japan, as President Koroma is expected to as well for bilateral talks.

Comment

17. (C) It seems Foreign Minister Bangura, the senior-most minister of the new government, is out of the country more than she is in it. That may be part of the reason disparate views are heard from ministers. Cabinet meetings are supposed to be held twice monthly but the schedule varies time from time. We are struck by the fact that some decisions are made only at the Presidential level thus hampering quick action on pending items. Bangura appears to be the most influential adviser to Koroma and we believe regular talks are important to obtain the factual, inside views of what is happening within the GOSL. Her involvement on issues from aircraft landings to food policy gives an idea of the scope of her portfolio. She is also the past master of both bilateral and multilateral affairs policy within the GOSL.
PERRY